

TUNA-DOLPHIN FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Tuna Purse Seine Fishing Practices

Q. Why do tuna purse seine fishers intentionally encircle dolphins?

A. Fishers in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean (ETP) tuna purse seine fishery prefer to target large, mature tuna -- the kind of tuna that swim in association with certain stock of dolphins. Therefore, fishers seek out tuna in areas where dolphins are present.

Q. Can't tuna purse seine fishers catch tuna without encircling dolphins?

A. Yes, and they often do. Many vessels make sets on floating objects (e.g., woody debris or other materials). Many non-dolphin sets are made on man-made fish aggregating devices other than natural floating objects, and fishers also set on free-swimming schools of tuna. However, sets on dolphins generally result in the catch of larger, mature tuna with minimal incidental bycatch of immature tuna and other marine life such as sea turtles and swordfish.

Q. What is the current level of dolphin mortality during tuna fishing operations using purse seine fishing gear, and how will the mortality level change as a result of the International Dolphin Conservation Program Act (IDCPA)?

A. The dolphin mortality in the ETP tuna purse seine fishery in 2000 was 1,636. Dolphin mortality has been below 2,000 since 1998 – down from a high of 133,000 in 1986. A total annual international dolphin mortality limit of 5,000 is set by the IDCPA and agreed to by the nations represented in the international fishing fleet that make up the International Dolphin Conservation Program. Stock-specific limits are established to ensure that no individual stock is adversely impacted.

Dolphin-safe Labeling Standards and Mark

Q. What does "dolphin-safe" mean?

A. Tuna and tuna products harvested in the ETP can be labeled "dolphin-safe" only if no intentional setting on dolphins occurred during the fishing trip and no dolphins are killed or seriously injured during the set in which the tuna were caught.

Q. How can consumers know that the canned tuna they buy is truly "dolphin-safe"?

A. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) developed a tracking and verification program to ensure that only tuna and tuna products that meet the definition of dolphin-safe are labeled "dolphin-safe." Through the tracking and verification program, NMFS can track tuna from the set in which the tuna is caught to the can in which the tuna is

packed.

Q. *How does NMFS track tuna on a per-set basis?*

A. As described earlier, NMFS has developed a tracking and verification program to monitor tuna from tuna capture through processing. A combination of vessel and observer records will be used to verify whether tuna should be labeled “dolphin-safe.”

Q. *How will the U.S. government ensure compliance of other nations with the labeling of tuna products?*

A. NMFS will monitor other nations’ compliance with the dolphin-safe labeling standard through its tracking and verification program.

Q. *How can you tell if fresh-caught tuna in grocery stores is "dolphin-safe"?*

A. Fresh tuna, by definition is “dolphin-safe,” because the fishing methods used to capture the tuna are not considered injurious to dolphins.

Q. *How can a consumer determine which tuna is truly "dolphin-safe" when there are several dolphin-safe labels being used by producers?*

A. Under the U.S. law and regulations using the term “dolphin-safe,” no matter how it is or is not displayed graphically, has the same meaning.

Q. *Where can consumers learn more about the dolphin-safe labeling standard?*

A. Consumers can learn more about the dolphin-safe labeling standard by visiting the NMFS web site at:
http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/PR2/Tuna_Dolphin/dolphin-safe.html

Economic Impacts

Q. *Is non-dolphin-safe tuna sold in the United States?*

A. Yes. Under the International Dolphin Conservation Protection Act, non-dolphin-safe tuna may be imported or sold into the United States, if the tuna was harvested in compliance with the International Dolphin Conservation Program and the harvesting nation has received an affirmative finding from NMFS.

Q. *Are schools, hospitals, and other institutions, for economic reasons, faced with a choice of buying either cheap tuna that kills dolphins or expensive tuna that is dolphin-safe?*

A. No, there is not a significant price difference between dolphin-safe and non-dolphin-safe tuna since the margin on canned tuna is very small.

Q. Are boats in this fishery required to carry observers onboard?

A. Yes. Since 1990, there has been an observer monitoring program on 100% of the US tuna purse seine vessels greater than 400 short tons. Under the Agreement on the International Dolphin Conservation Program (International Program), observers are required on every foreign and domestic, large, tuna purse seine vessel fishing in the ETP. This fishery is only one of two in the world that has 100% observer coverage.

Q. What measures/mechanisms are in place to ensure that other members of the IATTC comply with the requirements of the Agreement on the International Dolphin Conservation Program (AIDCP)?

A. The International Review Panel of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), a panel established under the AIDCP, will ensure that other members of the International Dolphin Conservation Program comply with the new requirements of the AIDCP. This panel meets approximately three times a year to review issues of compliance for vessels, fishing captains, and countries. Furthermore, the member nations have agreed to establish a compliance committee to monitor international compliance with the Agreement. If countries do not follow the agreement, they may face trade embargoes or other sanctions.